

## **ACTING FUNDAMENTALS: Finding Yourself Onstage**

Fall 2017, Course #190E Honors

Mon & Wed 1:25 – 3:45

Prof Judyie Al-Bilali - jalbilali@theater.umass.edu

Office Hours: Tues 12:30 – 1:30, Wed 11:30 – 12:30 and 4 - 5

Office Location: 27B (Rand Theater Lobby)

**“I truly believe there is *nothing* larger than life”.**

Uta Hagen, *A Challenge for the Actor*

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This course introduces the basics of acting technique and is suitable both for students with no previous theater background and for those who are experienced performers. Key to our work is creating an environment that encourages each participant's ability to trust their impulses by connecting fully to the body as the instrument of creativity. Our focus is two-fold; on building confidence in one's ability to communicate effectively and persuasively and second establishing an artistic ensemble.

We will use theater games and exercises to develop the skills necessary for the actor to live truthfully under the imaginary circumstances of the play. Students engage in a guided study of self-observation, applying discoveries made through careful script analysis to their monologues and scene work. Defining a healthy process for giving and receiving feedback is a cornerstone of this course. We will incorporate Liz Lerman's 'A Process for Critical Response' to set standards for constructive critique and to learn basic facilitation skills useful in a wide variety of professional fields.

The culminating project is an Open Studio presentation for an invited audience. Students become the performers and producers, taking responsibility for simple design elements, stage management, publicity and hospitality. Overall the curriculum emphasizes working as a cohort; a creative community is essential for students' individual and collective success.

Through studio work, reading and writing students will:

- Learn how to create a truthful physical life for the character
- Explore the steps to take when approaching a role
- Incorporate knowledge and discoveries into exercises and scene work
- Participate in collaboratively producing an arts event
- Develop habits to serve as a foundation for sustained creative practice

## Required Texts

Hagen, Uta. A Respect for Acting

Son, Diana. Stop Kiss

Hagen, Uta. A Challenge for the Actor, 'What Does It Take?' (available on Moodle)

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Acting is a craft that demands both an artistic and a scientific approach. In the first part of the semester students will concentrate on a series of Object Exercises developed by master teacher Uta Hagen to equip the actor with tools for portraying a character. By applying the lessons and techniques learned students come to understand the steps necessary to create a role. In the second half of the semester students research theater literature to choose their own monologues (subject to approval by instructor) for presentation in class. Students are also cast in various scenes from the play *Stop Kiss* to be performed at the Open Studio. Detailed written character profiles for both scripts require actors to dissect the play for clues about their roles and to stimulate their imagination towards mounting an engaging performance. Students are required to attend two campus performances and write a response paper for one of the shows. Reading and writing assignments are due as outlined in the course schedule.

## Studio Work

### Requirements

As appropriate to training in the theatre attendance and punctuality are mandatory. This is a studio class and as a member of the ensemble you are expected to be on time, arrive prepared to work and to remain for the duration of the class. Promptness is essential in all theatre work. Late arrival to class will disrupt the warm-up and the focus of the ensemble. Repeated lateness will affect the final grade. For each unexcused absence your grade will be lowered one half letter grade. Absences are excused at the discretion of the instructor, advanced written notification is expected. Medical absences require a note, either from a private physician or from the UMass Health Center.

### Expectations

- ***turn off pagers, cell phones and electronic devices for the entire class including breaks***
- dress for movement and comfort including appropriate footwear
- water only in the studio, bring food or beverages for our break
- respect all ensemble members' time, space and contributions to class
- actors must schedule outside rehearsals and book practice space as necessary

## Written Assignments

All written assignments are double spaced in 12 point font, and are due at the beginning of the class. Assignments turned in late will be discounted one half grade for each class they are late and will not be accepted if they are late more than two class periods.

### What Does It Take?:A Creative Bio

In the Prologue to *A Challenge for the Actor* Uta Hagen describes her background and the early life experiences that prepared her for a career as an actor. Please write your own bio citing specific cultural and creative influences or interests that are your foundation for an artistic life. The length of the assignment is 3-4 pages.

### Maintaining a Journal/Character Analysis

Throughout the course and ideally as an on-going part of your creative process you will maintain a journal. It is a consistent record of your acting work, research for roles, responses and questions about acting exercises, opinions on the assigned readings, notes on performances attended, etc. The written assignments are character analyses for both your monologue and scene characters. Specific questions regarding your characters will be provided; the length is 3-4 pages.

### Performance Response Paper

During the semester students are required to attend one UMass Theater Dept. show and another theater production of your choice. Either performance can serve as the basis of your paper, length is 3-4 pages. Please consult the UMass Theater website for dates and times of performances.

*Please Note: It is your responsibility to reserve tickets before performances sell out.*

### Final Self-Assessment

Students will submit a final self-assessment evaluating your work for the semester citing specific practices that have enhanced your acting technique. The length is 2-3 pages.

## Grade Percentages

Class attendance, preparation, and participation	20%
<i>What Does It Take?:A Creative Bio</i>	10%
Performance Response Paper	10%
Character Analyses (monologue and scene)	20%
Monologue Presentations	15%
Scene Presentations – Open Studio	15%
Final Self-Assessment	10%

## **Student Conduct and Academic Honesty**

Students are responsible for complying with University of Massachusetts' standards of student conduct and academic honesty. The prescribed penalty for academic dishonesty consists of an automatic 'F' for the course and notification of campus authorities.

## **Individual Needs**

This course must be as inclusive as possible and your communication is appreciated. Please notify the instructor if there is anything to be aware of regarding your particular needs or characteristics, such as a medical condition, a hidden disability, etc. that may influence your participation or your personal well-being. This disclosure is optional, or if you wish, only for selected individuals. UMass Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS) you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations.

## **Open Door Policy**

If the requirements for the course are unclear please consult with the instructor during office hours, appointments can be made by contacting the instructor via e-mail or either before or after class times. Every effort is made to create a safe environment and a comfortable learning community for everyone. If at any time you feel it necessary, please feel free to address these issues with the instructor.

## **Email Policy**

Email will be answered during the week within 24 hours, email sent over the weekend will be answered on Monday.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE** (subject to change)

<b>Week 1:</b>	<b>Introduction and Ensemble Building</b>
9/6	Warm-ups and games
<b>Week 2:</b>	<b>The Basic Object Exercise</b>
9/11	Review syllabus, Reading: Introduction and the Basic Object Exercise, <i>Respect for Acting</i> pgs. 81-94
9/13	Basic Object Exercise
<b>Week 3:</b>	<b>The Basic Object Exercise (continued)</b>
9/18	Reading: Prologue: "What Does It Take?" <i>A Challenge for the Actor</i>
9/20	Reading: Identity pgs. 22-33 and Concept pgs. 11-21

- Week 4: Preceding & Immediate Circumstances**  
 9/25 Reading: Three Entrances, pgs. 95-101
- 9/27 Writing: "What Does It Take?" Assignment due
- Week 5: Physical State**  
 10/1 Reading: Circumstances, pgs. 158-164
- 10/3 Reading: Immediacy, pgs. 102-105
- Week 6: Substitution**  
 10/9 Columbus Day Holiday – no class
- 10/10 Monologue selections submitted for approval – Monday schedule followed
- 10/11 Reading: The Five Senses pgs. 60-64 and Substitution, pgs.34-45
- Week 7: The Fourth Wall**  
 10/16 Reading: The Fourth Wall, pgs. 106-111
- 10/18 Reading: Endowment, pgs.112-118
- Week 8: First Round Monologues**  
 10/23 Reading: Emotional Memory, pgs. 46-51 and Sense Memory, pgs. 52-59
- 10/25 Scenes and scene partners assigned
- Week 9: First Round Monologues**  
 10/30 Reading: The Objective, The Obstacle and The Action, pgs. 174-190
- 11/1 Writing: Monologue Character Analysis due
- Week 10: Final Round Monologues**  
 11/6 & 8
- Week 11: Open Studio Scenes**  
 11/13 & 15 First readings
- Week 12: Thanksgiving Recess**  
 11/20 & 22 no classes
- Week 13: Open Studio rehearsals**  
 11/27 & 29 Scenes continued

**Week 14: Open Studio rehearsals**  
12/4 & 6      Scenes continued

**Week 15: Open Studio rehearsals**  
12/11      Run-thru and tech for Open Studio

Performance Response Paper Scene due  
Character Analysis due

**Finals Week: Open Studio Final Performance**  
Dress Rehearsal & Performance (Date & Times TBA)